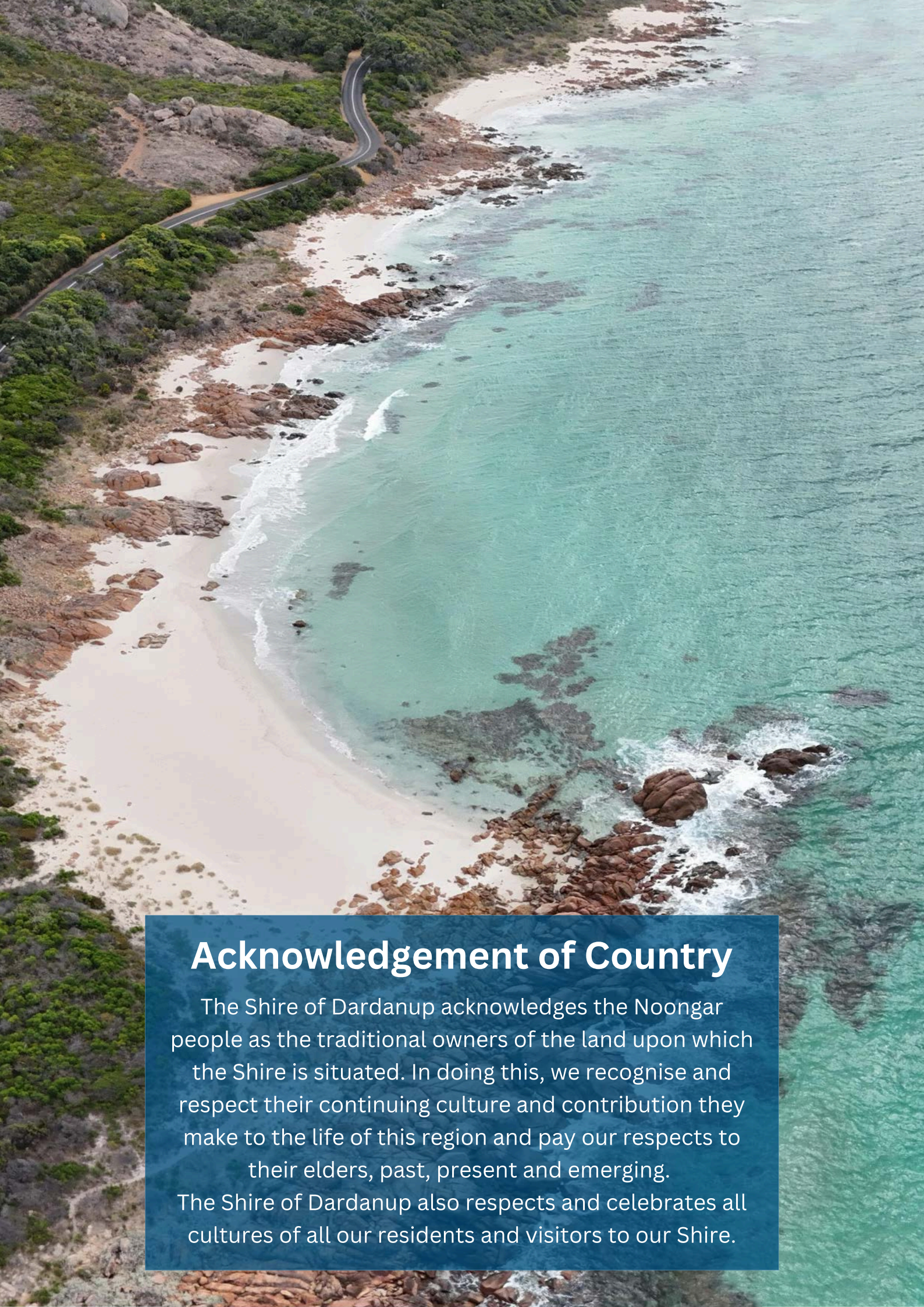
Shire of Dardanup

South-West Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA)

Annual Report 2025





Acknowledgement of Country

The Shire of Dardanup acknowledges the Noongar people as the traditional owners of the land upon which the Shire is situated. In doing this, we recognise and respect their continuing culture and contribution they make to the life of this region and pay our respects to their elders, past, present and emerging.

The Shire of Dardanup also respects and celebrates all cultures of all our residents and visitors to our Shire.



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Message from the CEO

This year has been one of significance for our Designated Area Migration Agreement (DAMA).

I am pleased to report that we have received the highest number of applications since the DAMA's inception - clear evidence of the strong demand from local employers and the continued relevance of the program in supporting workforce needs across our region.

This outcome reflects the dedication of our team and stakeholders, and I would like to acknowledge the outstanding contribution of Elizabeth Stacey our DAR officer, whose professionalism, persistence, and commitment have been instrumental in guiding employers through an increasingly complex process.

While the year has delivered record activity, it has also brought challenges. It is disappointing that both State and Federal Governments have ultimately preferred to wind up the regional DAMAs in favour of transition to the WA State DAMA.

Regional DAMAs were designed to respond to local labour market realities, and their success, demonstrated again this year, underscores the value of community-led, place-based solutions.

The decision has been met with understandable concern from businesses who have relied on the flexibility and responsiveness of our regional arrangement.

Looking ahead to 2026, the final year of our DAMA, I remain optimistic. Our focus is firmly on maximising outcomes for our community and businesses during this transition period.

We are committed to working constructively with the WA DAMA to ensure that regional voices are heard and that local employers achieve the best access to skilled labour under the new framework.



André Schönfeldt
Chief Executive Officer
Shire of Dardanup

Message from the South-West DAMA Officer

The South-West DAMA had another great year in 2025.

Starting the year with a newly-expanded occupation list and increased nomination ceiling meant that we were able to accommodate more applications and endorsements for businesses in the South-West.

With a change in policy reducing the qualifying time for permanent residency, we received our first permanent visa grants in 2025 - showing the applicants long-term commitment to their employers and the region.

We were disappointed to learn in October 2025 that the South-West DAMA would not be renewed for another five-year term.

However we have been working pro-actively with the Department of Home Affairs (Commonwealth) and the Department of Training and Workforce Development (WA) to assist in transitioning the South-West DAMA into the state-based WA DAMA and to ensure that no businesses or visa applicants are worse off in the process.

Our focus has always been on support and advocacy for the poeple and the businesses of the South-West region - and this will continue as we transition into the new DAMA program.

Elizabeth Stacey
DAMA Officer
Shire of Dardanup

Definitions

Application:
Any request to be endorsed for a Labour Agreement under the South-West DAMA, this is made on behalf of a business in the South-West region.

Endorsement:
An application that meets the objectives of the South-West DAMA and is then passed to the Department of Home Affairs to start a Labour Agreement.

Business:
Any entity operating within the South-West that wishes to use the DAMA to sponsor workers.

Labour Agreement:
The contract made between the business and the Commonwealth that allows for the sponsorship of workers.

Applicants or nominees:
The people that are being sponsored for visas by South-West businesses to work in the region.



DAMA interest and usage

We entered 2025 of the South-West DAMA with a newly-expanded occupation list as well as a greater nomination ceiling, which were variations to the DAMA Head Agreement that were signed in November 2024.

As such, we have had increased usage of the program with each year and 2025 was our biggest year yet.

A total of 215 applications for endorsement were made in 2025. Of these, 102 were new applications for Labour Agreements, with the remainder being for variations on existing Labour Agreements. This is an increase on the 172 applications in 2024 and 85 in 2023.

This is the first full year with our expanded occupation list (127 occupations total) and once again, the most take up is in occupations not ordinarily accessed by the standard employer-sponsored or skilled visa programs.

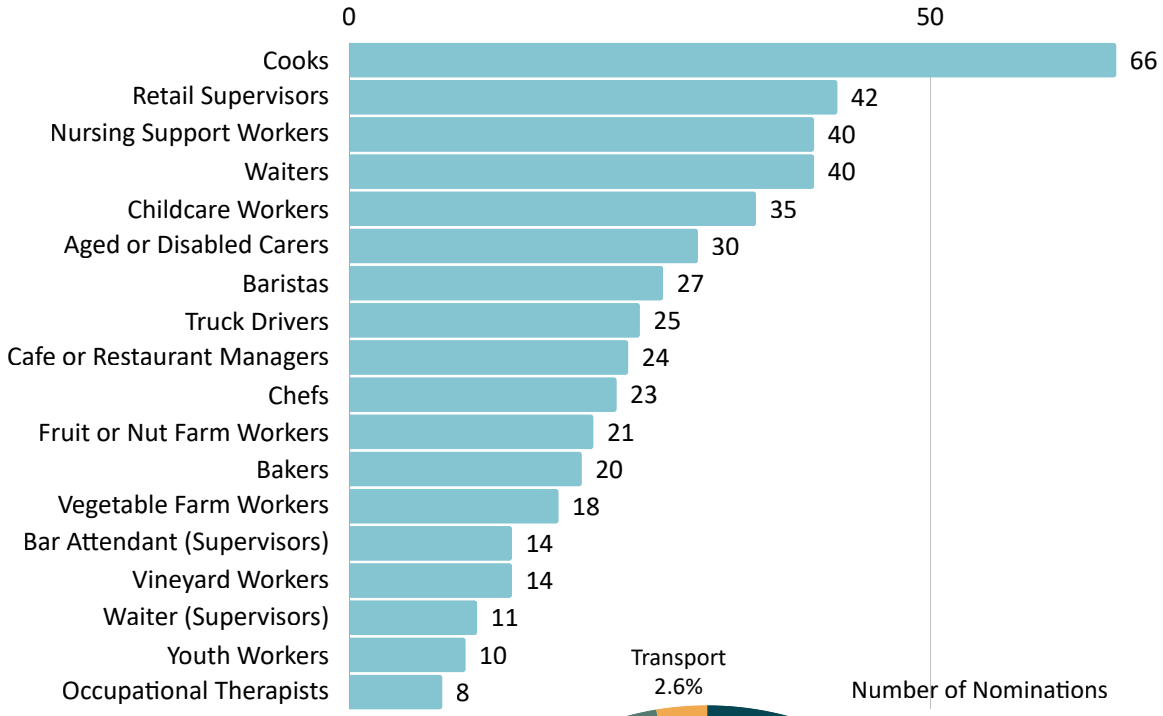
The most popular occupations were once again Cooks (13% of total endorsements) and Retail Supervisors (8.2%).

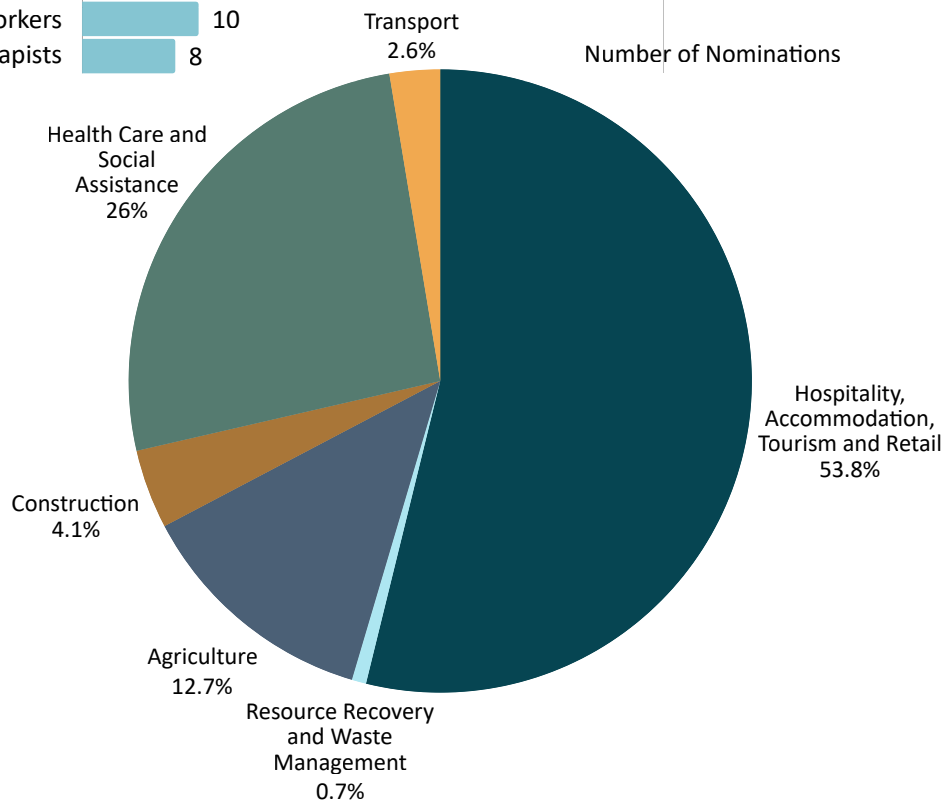
The most common industries were again Hospitality, Accommodation, Tourism and Retail (53.8%), followed by Health Care and Social Assistance (26%)

Occupations and concessions

Occupations in the South-West DAMA

In the 2025 program year, there has been 534 nominations for endorsement across 52 occupations, this is the largest year we have had in the program in terms of applications, occupations and nominations endorsed. The most popular occupations and the breakdown by industry are detailed below:





Occupations and concessions

Salary concession

The Temporary Skilled Migration Income Threshold/Core Skills Income Threshold (TSMIT/CSIT) is the minimum salary requirement as set by the Department of Home Affairs that applies to all employer sponsored visa applications.

As part of the negotiations for the South-West DAMA agreement, a 10% concession to this requirement was agreed to account for the semi-skilled occupations that are commonly seen in the DAMA occupation list, to align with the market rates of the region.

As part of the Migration Review undertaken by the current Government in 2023, the TSMIT/CSIT level is indexed every year to account for inflation. This increased the new threshold from $73,150 to $76,515 from 1 July 2025.

Of the 511 endorsed nominations, 161 of these positions did not require a salary concession. Those that did not require concession where occupations in skill levels 1 and 2 or from large companies which are only minimally affected by the TSMIT increase.

The salary concession that has been approved for those positions is the concession ‘Type 1’ which allows an endorsed business to pay the salary of the nominee at the rate of 90% of the current TSMIT/CSIT, provided they have provided evidence that the reduced salary aligns with the award and the market rate (whichever is higher) for that position in the region.

Evidence must also be shown that the nominee is getting paid at the same rate as an equivalent Australian worker, if there is one in that position already. There has been no request for the salary concession ‘Type 2’ which allows for a 10% reduction in the TSMIT requirement, with a further 10% made up of non-monetary benefits.

Occupations and concessions

English concession

A concession to the English requirement is available for certain roles in the South-West DAMA Occupation List. When a concession is requested, the sponsoring business needs to show that the applicant's English level will not affect their ability to work safely and effectively. This concession allows a visa to be granted with an overall 'Vocational English' level and no minimum score in Reading, Writing, Listening or Speaking.

Of the 353 endorsed positions eligible for this concession in 2025, 257 positions, or 72.8%, were endorsed with an English concession applied. This concession is used when an applicant may not ordinarily qualify for a visa with their level of English procifiency, or when a business wants to widen its options for finding a suitable nominee.

Age concessions

Under the South-West DAMA, businesses can access age concessions for the Skilled Employer-Sponsored Regional (subclass 494) and Nominated Employer-Sponsored (subclass 186) visas up to age 55 for skill levels 1-4, and up to 50 for skill level 5 occupations. This is a higher age limit than the standard employer-sponsored visa pathway which generally goes up to age 45.

Of those nominations eligible for an age concession, 95 nominees (72%) opted for an age concession, whereas 38 nominees did not request one or did not require one.

There is no age limit that applies to the temporary 482 Skills in Demand visa.

Endorsement process

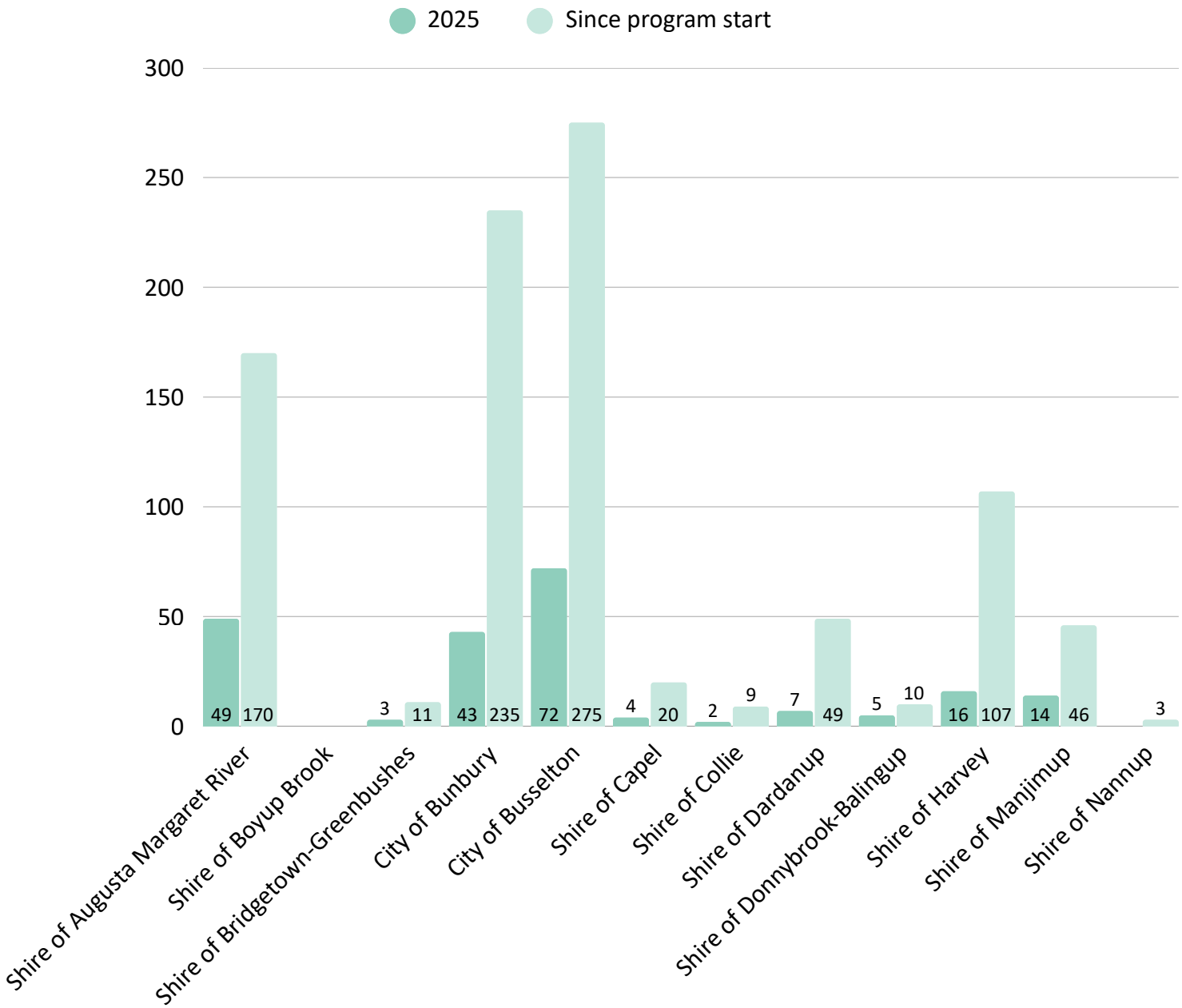
The endorsement process has remained largely unchanged throughout 2025. As always, we aim to streamline and improve processing timeframes with a focus on compliance.

Applicants lodge an application online and are generally assessed by the following:

Based in the South-West	Is the business established and operating for a period within the designated South-West region?
Occupations and concessions are available	Are the occupations available under the South-West DAMA? Is a concession available and required for the role?
Financially viable	Does the business have the financial capacity to support their workers for the duration of their visas?
Genuine need	Does the position fit within the scope of the business? Are there no suitably skilled Australians that could fill the role?
Supports the objectives of the South-West DAMA	Will the applicant have the support they need to thrive in the region? Does the business have a long-term commitment to the region?

Local Government Area breakdown

Over the course of the 2025 South-West DAMA Program Year, there were a total 215 applications for endorsement from South-West businesses. Of these, 102 applications were new applications for a Labour Agreement, while the remaining 113 were to make variations on existing Labour Agreements. This demonstrates that three years into the DAMA program, that there is still new and existing take-up of the program to offer a staffing solution for South-West businesses. These applications are represented by the following participating Local Government Areas:



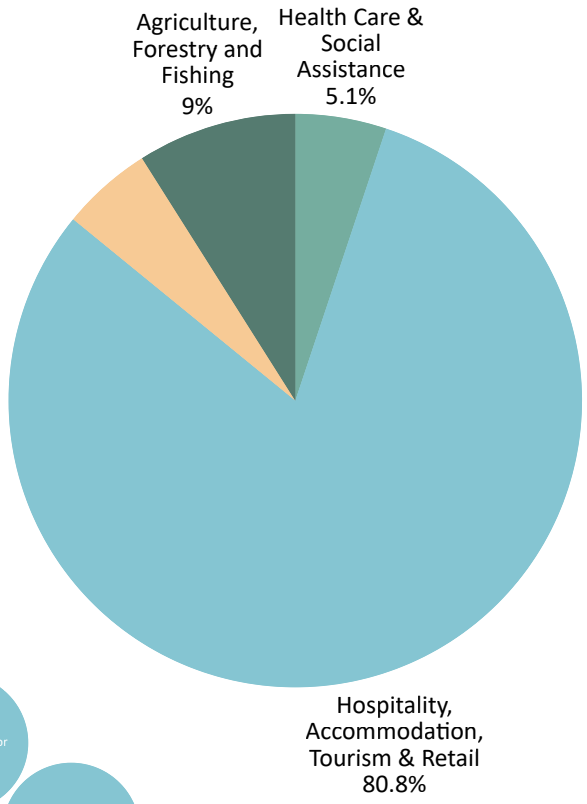
Shire of Augusta Margaret River

49
Applications for endorsement

48
Applications endorsed

78
Applicants endorsed for nomination

Breakdown of nominations within the Shire of Augusta Margaret River by industry.





Occupations being applied for by applicants within the Shire of Augusta Margaret River.

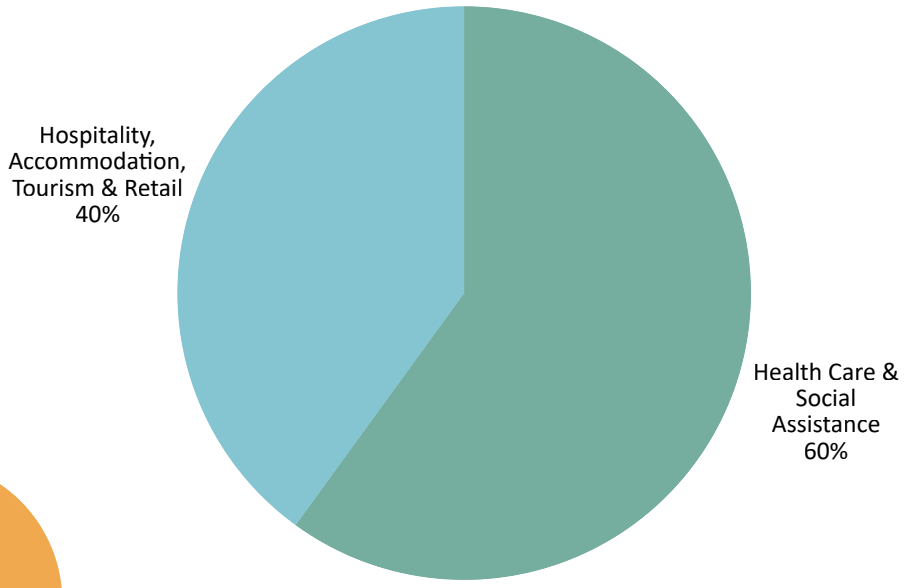
Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes

3
Applications for endorsement

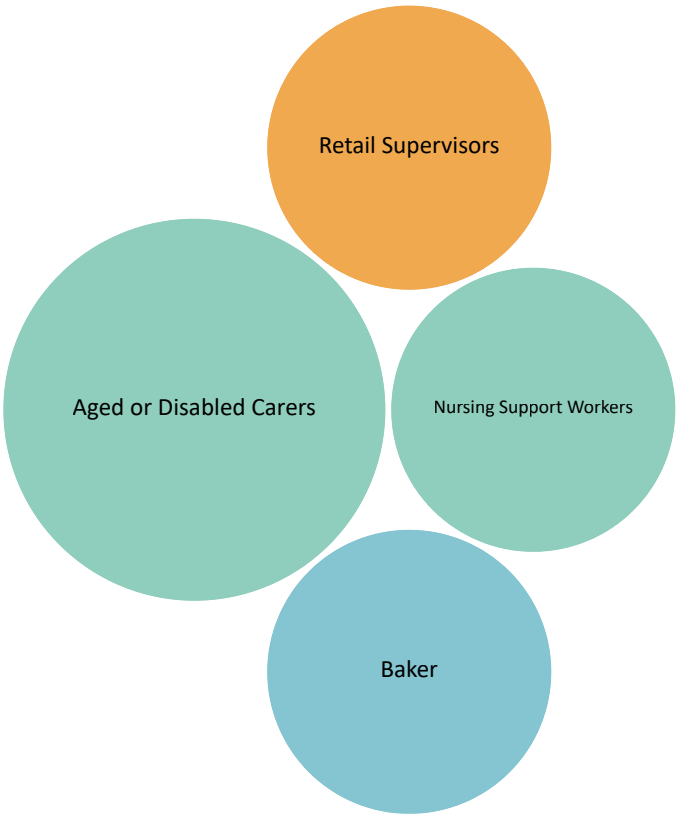
3
Applications endorsed

5
Applicants endorsed for nomination

Breakdown of nominations within the Shire of Birdgetown-Greenbushes by industry.



Occupations being applied for by applicants within the Shire of Bridgetown-Greenbushes.



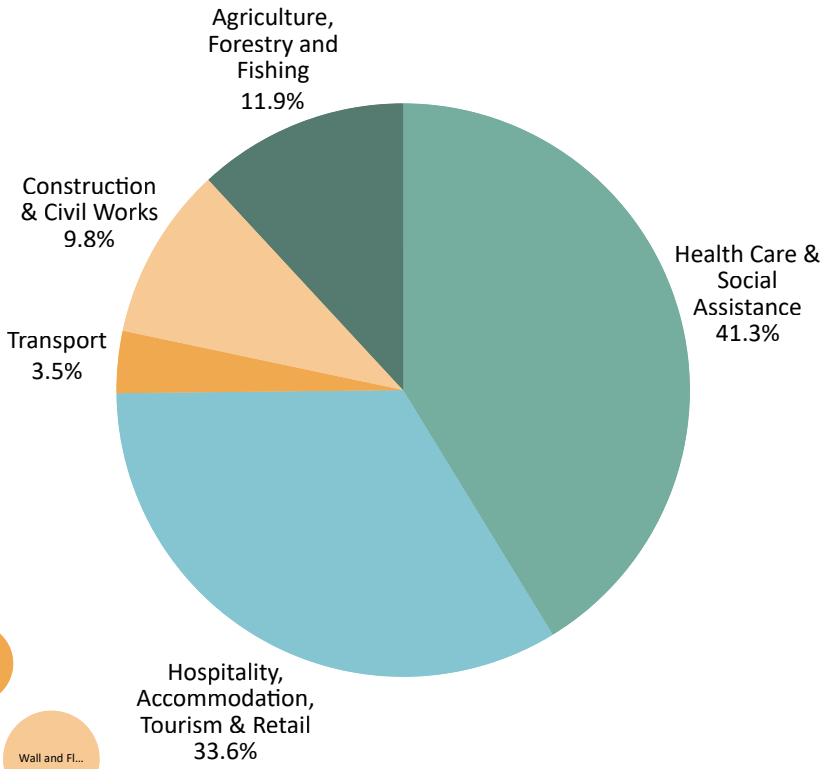
City of Bunbury

43
Applications for endorsement

40
Applications endorsed

143
Applicants endorsed for nomination

Breakdown of nominations within the City of Bunbury by industry.





Occupations being applied for by applicants within the City of Bunbury.

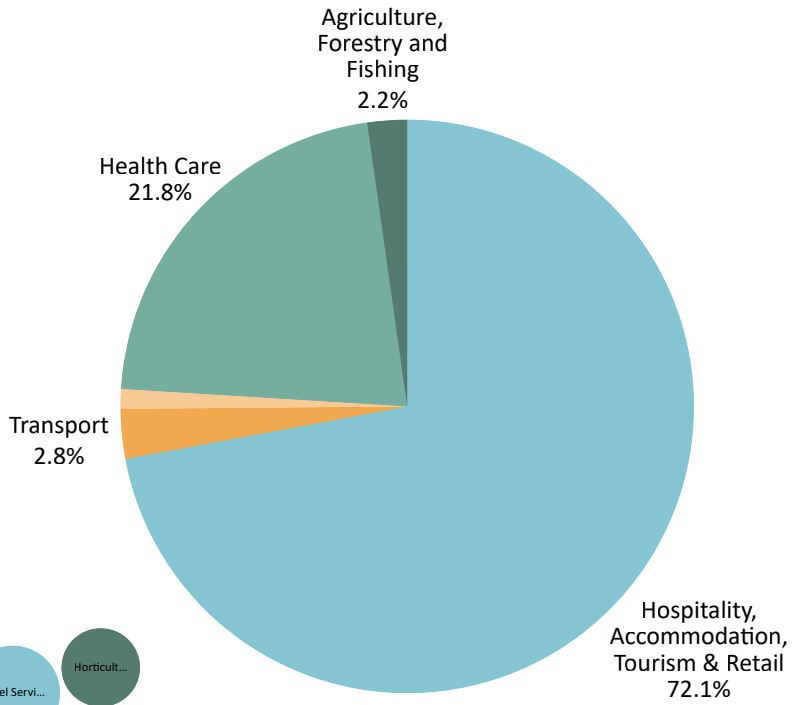
City of Busselton

72
Applications for endorsement

71
Applications endorsed

179
Applicants endorsed for nomination

Breakdown of nominations within the City of Busselton by industry.





Occupations being applied for by applicants within the City of Busselton.

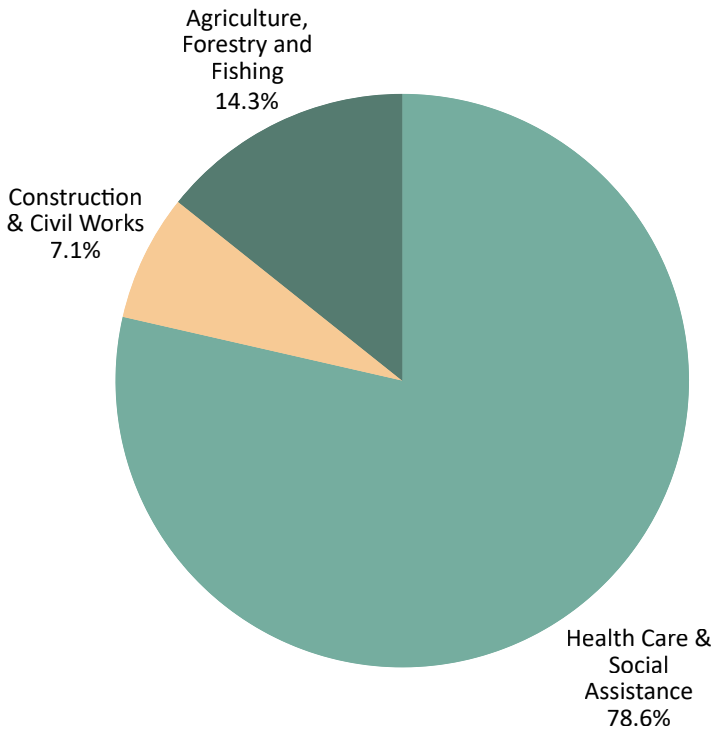
Shire of Capel

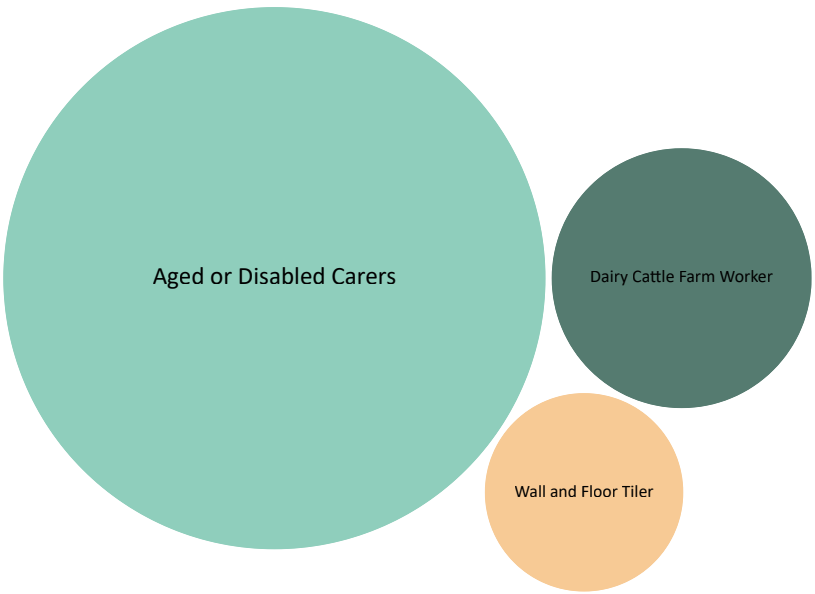
4
Applications for endorsement

4
Applications endorsed

14
Applicants endorsed for nomination

Breakdown of nominations within the Shire of Capel by industry.





Occupations being applied for by applicants within the Shire of Capel.

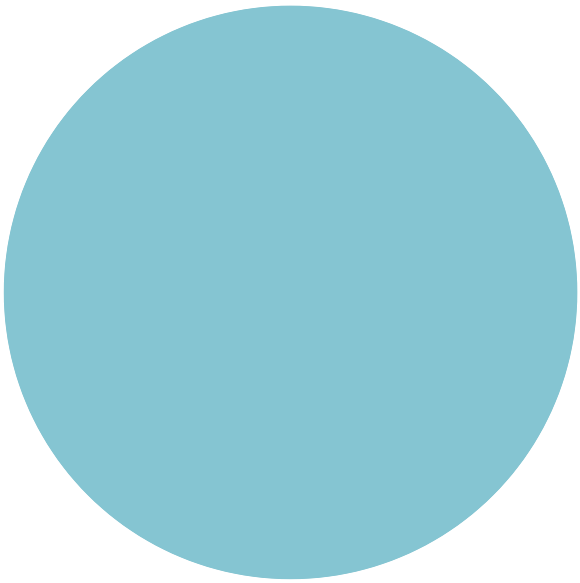
Shire of Collie

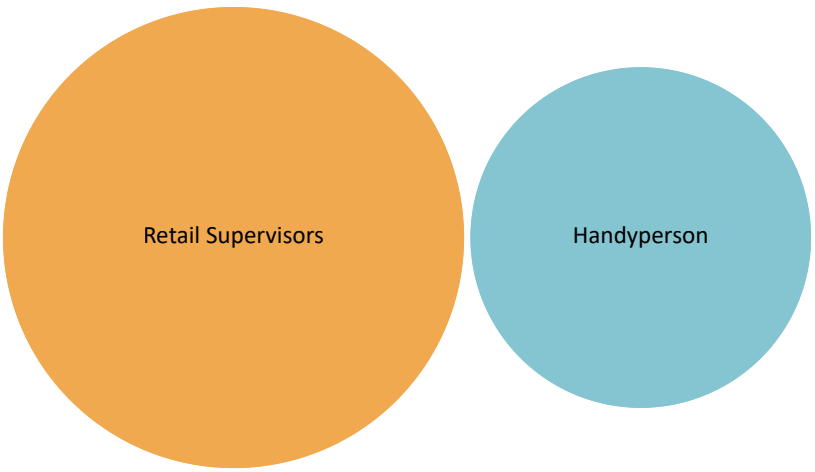
2
Applications for endorsement

2
Applications endorsed

3
Applicants endorsed for nomination

Breakdown of nominations within the Shire of Collie by industry.





Occupations being applied for by applicants within the Shire of Collie.

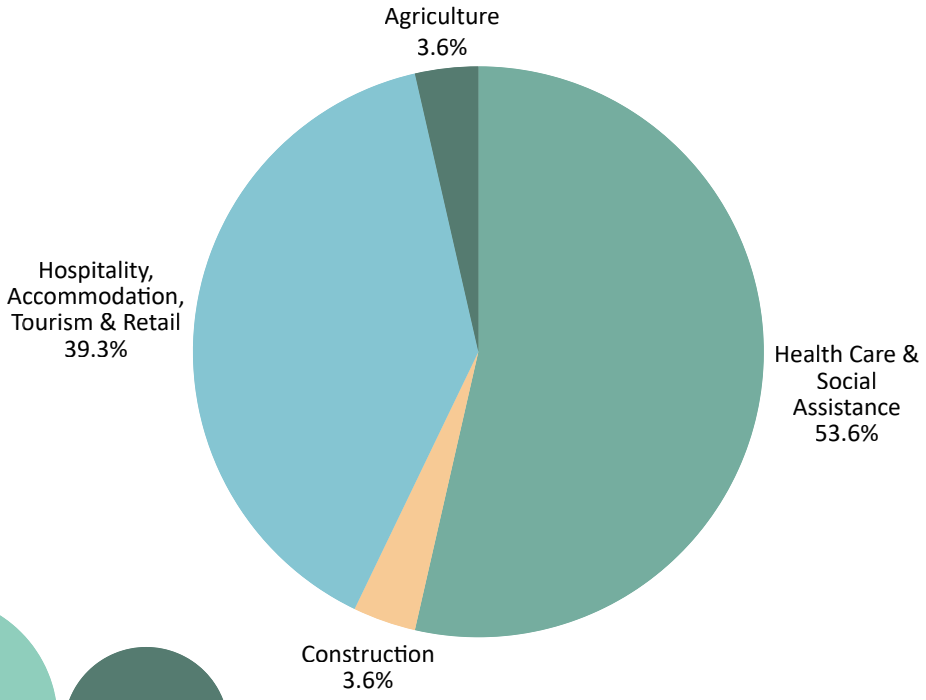
Shire of Dardanup

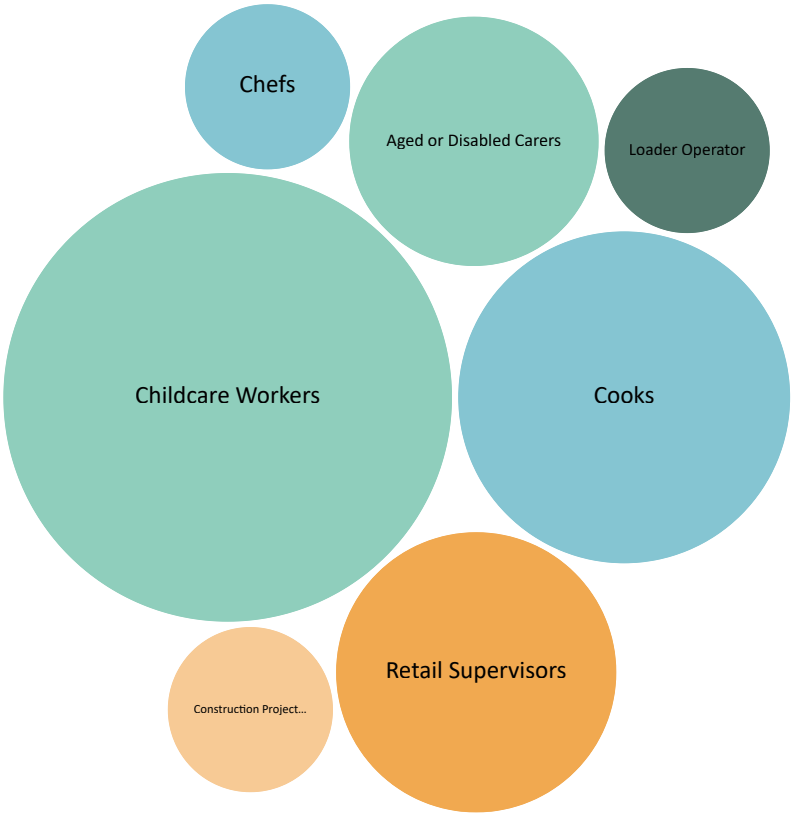
7
Applications for endorsement

7
Applications endorsed

28
Applicants endorsed for nomination

Breakdown of nominations within the Shire of Dardanup by industry.





Occupations being applied for by applicants within the Shire of Dardanup.

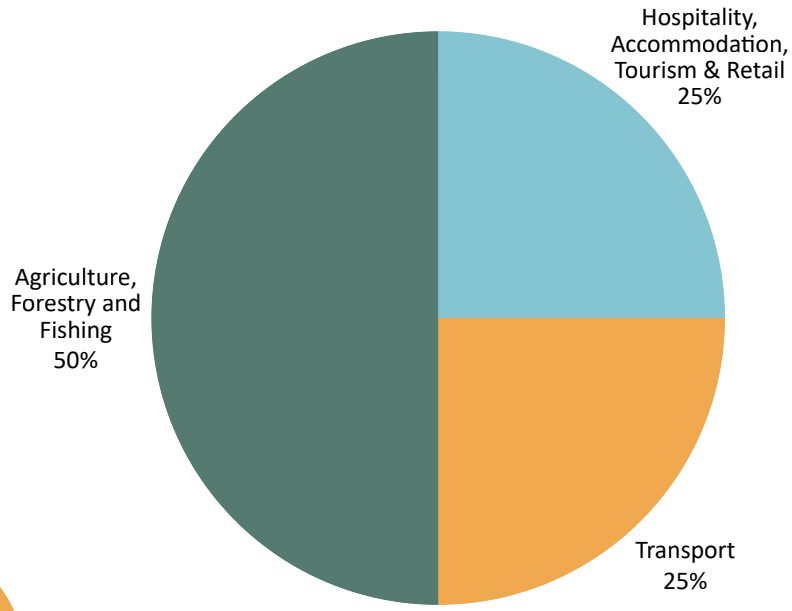
Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup

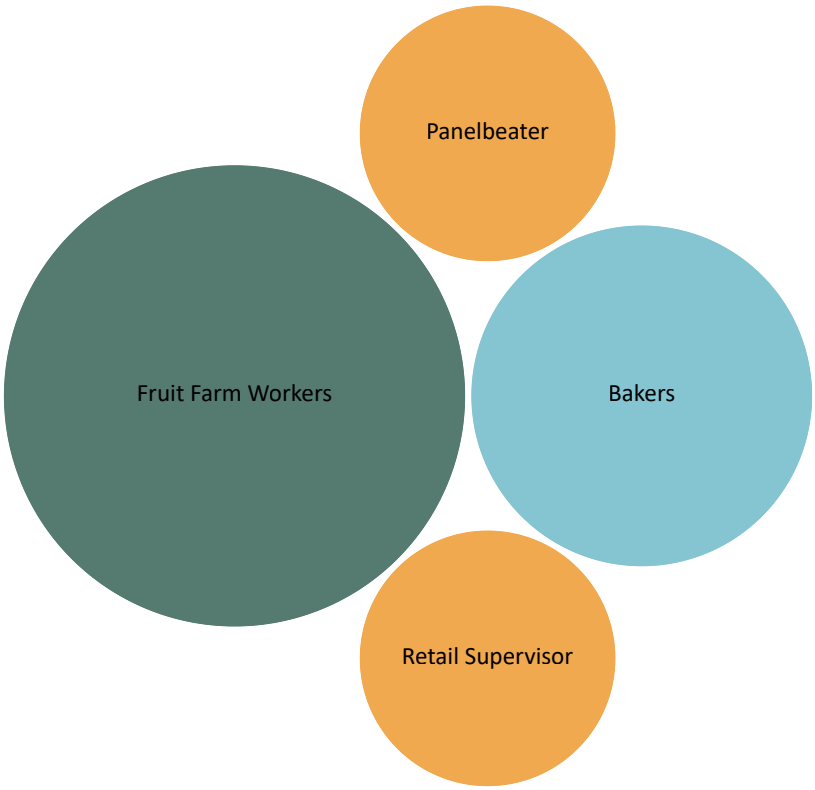
5
Applications for endorsement

5
Applications endorsed

8
Applicants endorsed for nomination

Breakdown of nominations within the Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup by industry.





Occupations being applied for by applicants within the Shire of Donnybrook-Balingup.

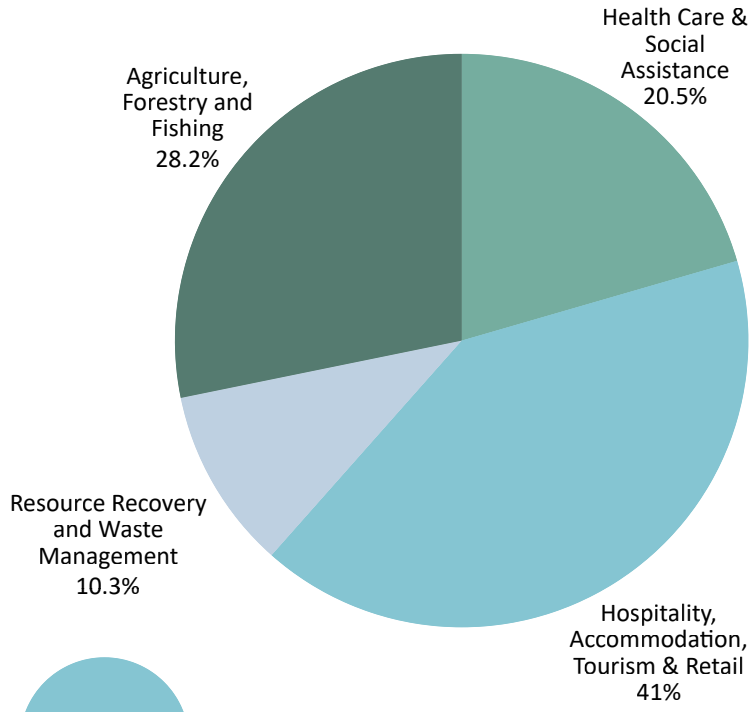
Shire of Harvey

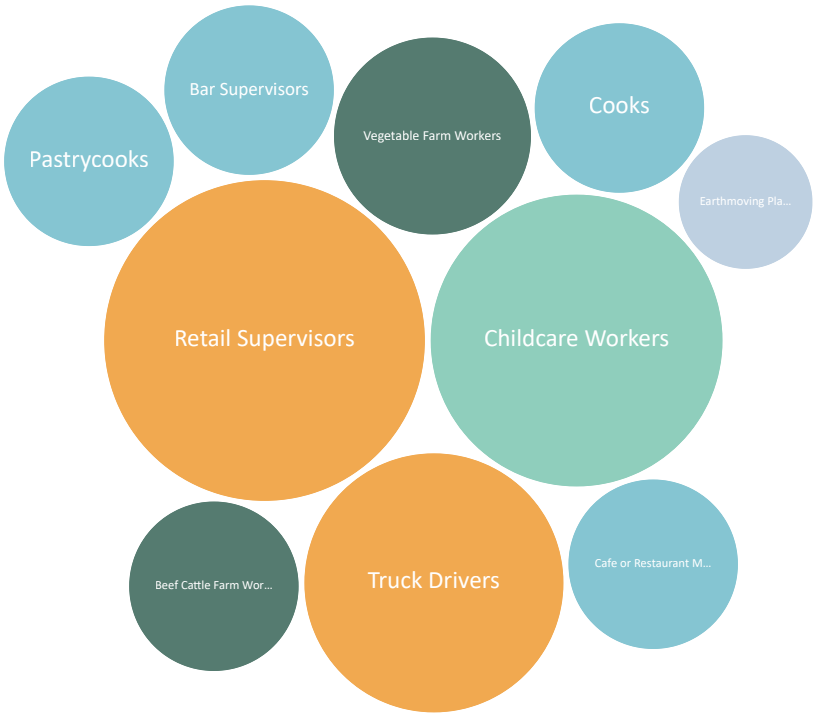
16
Applications for endorsement

14
Applications endorsed

39
Applicants endorsed for nomination

Breakdown of nominations within the Shire of Harvey by industry.





Occupations being applied for by applicants within the Shire of Harvey.

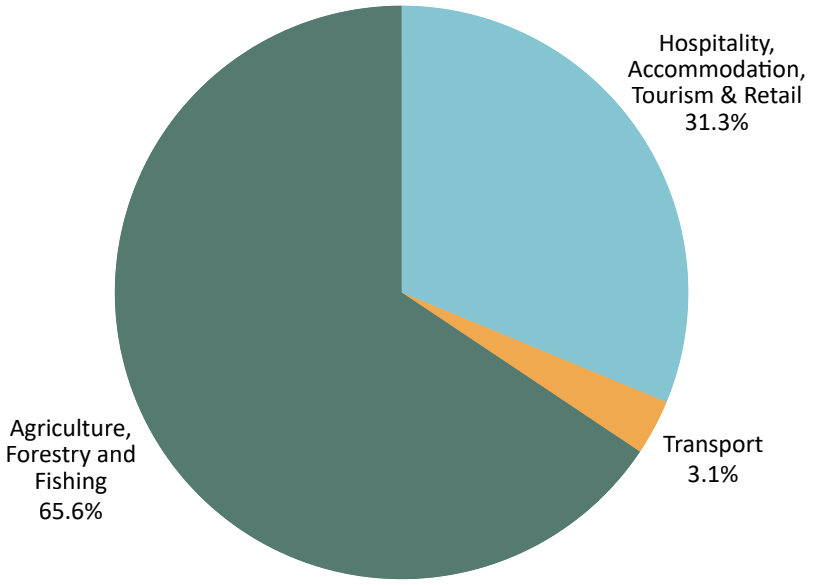
Shire of Manjimup

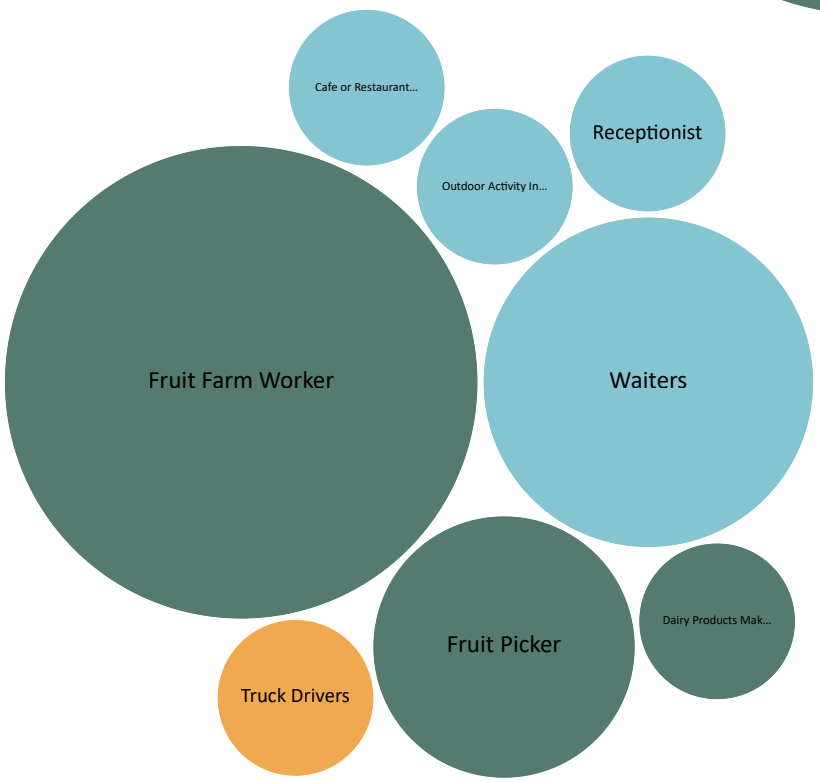
14
Applications for endorsement

13
Applications endorsed

32
Applicants endorsed for nomination

Breakdown of nominations within the Shire of Manjimup by industry.





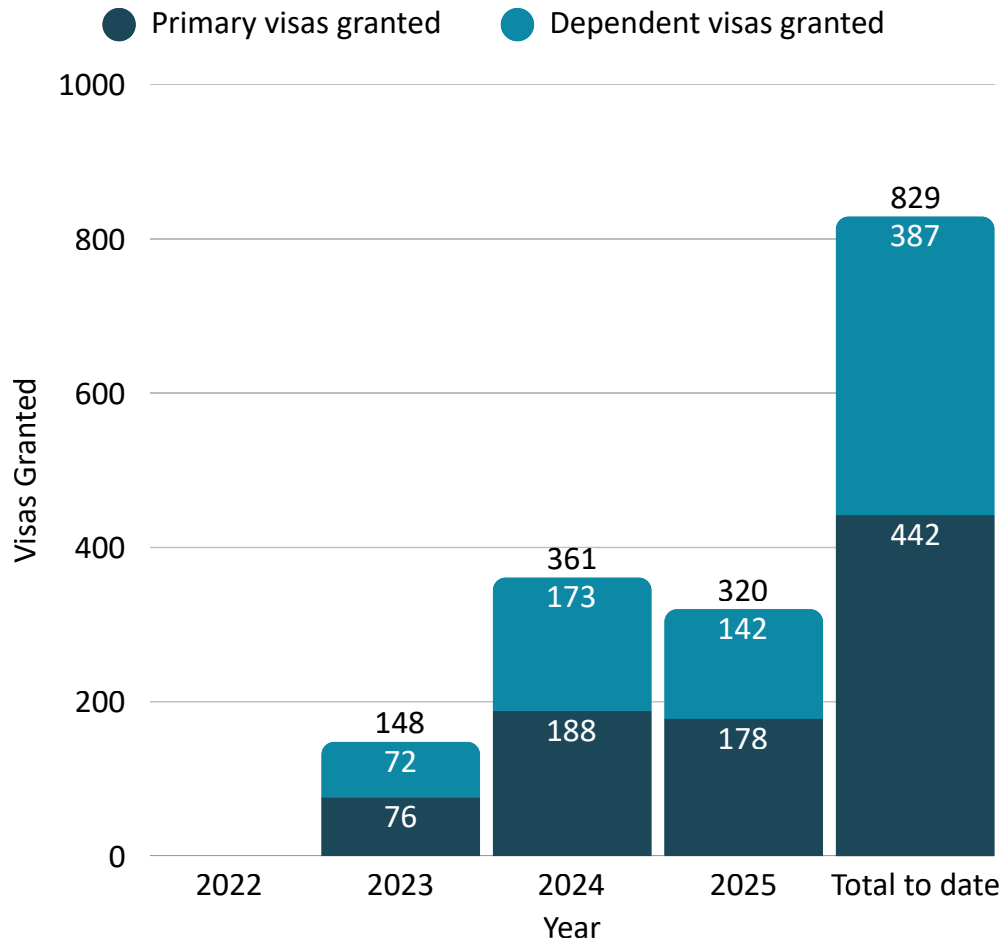
Occupations being applied for by applicants within the Shire of Manjimup.

Visa grants under the South-West DAMA

The visa grants that are made under the South-West DAMA are the end result in the business endorsement process that begins with the Shire of Dardanup. While the Labour Agreement, nomination and visa application process are all managed by the Department of Home Affairs, it is these skilled workers, along with their families, that work and contribute to our communities. An overview of the Labour Agreements and visa grants granted through the program is demonstrated below:

252 South-West Businesses with Labour Agreements

Over 800 primary and dependent visas granted



South-West labour market

The South-West labour market has remained largely unchanged since the inception of the South-West DAMA program. Unemployment has risen slightly to 3.2%, below the national average of 4.5%[1]

The South-West has a strong reliance on the mining, agriculture and manufacturing sectors and given the shifts in demand for critical minerals, some downturn in this space is to be expected.

Available housing in the region remains an issue, and the need for skilled workers will continue to increase in industries relating to construction and renewable energy as we continue the transition into green energy.

Health

Groundwork has commenced on the new Bunbury Hospital redevelopment, valued at $471.5 million. This project aims to transform Bunbury Hospital into one of the most advanced facilities in regional Australia. The redevelopment underscores the hospital's significance as a vital healthcare hub for the entire South-West region.

Technology

The Western Power Advanced Manufacturing and Technology (AMTECH) Hub that was announced at the end of 2022 has been confirmed for a site in Picton (City of Bunbury) and has secured funding through the WA Labor Government. It is proposed to be a site of manufacturing for the infrastructure to support the transition to renewable energy.

1. *Labour Market Data Dashboard - Source ABS Labour Force Australia, Detailed Sept 2025*

South-West labour market

Tourism

The Busselton-Margaret River airport (City of Busselton) continues to drive tourism participation to the South-West region. Flights between Perth and Busselton were launched by QantasLink in June 2025 and then discontinued after three months due to lack of take-up over the quieter winter season.

Busselton and Margaret River continue to be tourism hotspots, attracting international and interstate visitors to their world-class sporting events, food and wine and arts events.

Busselton won the hosting of Triple J's One Night Stand concert in May - a youth-focussed music festival bringing together local and national artists and broadcast across the country.

The nearby Shire of Nannup continues to attract visitors from far and wide, hosting world-class mountain biking events as well as the annual Nannup Music Festival.

Feedback

The South-West DAMA has just completed its fourth year of the program and the growth with each year - as well as the repeat custom of businesses holding a Labour Agreement - demonstrate that it is a viable option for businesses requiring skilled labour for their busineses.

Now that we are starting to see permanent visa grants through the program, we hope to see that participants in the South-West DAMA continue to feel belonging in their communities and choose to make the South-West region their home.

We were disappointed to learn that the South-West DAMA would not be reviewed beyond its current term to December 2026 and we hope that the regional voices and concerns continue to be heard at a state and federal level when it comes to the topic of skilled migration.

For more information visit the Shire's dedicated South-West DAMA website at: https://swdama.dardanup.wa.gov.au

www.dardanup.wa.gov.au/south-west-dama-apply-now.aspx